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REMARKS

Claims 1-4, 6 and 8-34 are pending in this application.

Claims 21-29 were objected to due to alleged informalities, but the suggested correction is not understood by applicants' attorneys and is believed to be improper. Referral to the MPEP to illustrate this type of informality would be appreciated. It is respectfully submitted that the claims are appropriate as written and that the objection should be withdrawn.

Claims 1-3, 6, 8-13, 18-21 and 24-27 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(e) for allegedly being anticipated by European patent application 1,174,667, while claims 4, 14-17 and 23 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as allegedly being obvious over that European patent application. Applicants traverse these rejections.

The present application was filed July 3, 2001, while European patent application 1,174,667 was published on January 23, 2002. The 2/2001 date attributed to the reference by the Examiner is incorrect under US law. Furthermore, the US application that corresponds to the European patent application was published on October 31, 2002 (US2002/0157411), and was filed from a Japanese language PCT application that was published August 30, 2001. Accordingly, neither the European patent application nor the PCT or US applications are prior art to the present application, and no rejections of the present claims can be properly made based on those documents.

In view of the above remarks, the entire application is now in condition for allowance, early notice of which would be appreciated.

Respectfully submitted,

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